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CYCLONE NISARGA BATTERS KONKAN, SPARES MUMBAI

The cyclone made landfall in Maharashtra's Raigad district around 1 pm on Wednesday bringing winds of up to 120 kph

FALLING TREES DAMAGE HOUSES, CARS

The cyclone uprooted trees and electricity poles causing widespread damages to private property in the worst-hit Raigad district where a 58-year-old man was killed, when a power transformer, knocked down by strong winds, fell over him. Falling trees blocked roads and caused damages to houses and cars in others districts along the Konkan coast

HEAVY RAINS LASH MUMBAI, PUNE

- By evening, Nisarga weakened into a cyclonic storm and headed for Maharashtra's north-east. It may weaken further by midnight
- Although spared the cyclone's full fury, Mumbai and Pune were lashed by heavy rains, that caused waterlogging in many areas. Gujarat, which evacuated thousands, reported no big damage P8

18,887

PEOPLE MOVED TO 35 TEMPORARY SHELTERS IN MUMBAI

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KARWAR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Ramavatar Singh (in blue shirt) helps a woman take away sand dug out from an MGNREGA work site

SACKED TEACHERS, GRADS TURN TO MANUAL LABOUR

RAJESH ASHANI, RAGHOTTAM KOPPAR, S RAJA REDDY, A AMRUTH RAO, ANTHONY FERNANDO & MUKESH RANJAN @ Jaipur / Gadag / Adilabad / Mahabubnagar / Nagapattinam / Ranchi

RAMAVATAR Singh, 35, stands out as the odd one out among the 100-plus labourers working on a well under an unrelenting summer sun in Jobner, 70 km from Jaipur.

While the other labourers comprising mainly women and a handful of men appear rustic, under-fed, sporting rubber slippers and lungis, Singh is tall, well-built, clad in a shirt and trousers and clearly not village-bred.

Singh led a rather comfortable life, earning ₹15,000 a month as a private school teacher in Jobner. That is, until Covid-19 struck and a lockdown was ordered on March 25.

A postgraduate in political science, he was sacked from his job and has been unpaid since. At first, Singh managed with the meagre savings he had, but when the cash dried up and there was no one to borrow money from, he enrolled himself as a worker under the MGNREGA.

"After the lockdown, the school authorities refused to pay salary and dismissed me. With all factories and markets closed, I had no choice but to work under the MGNREGA to earn money," he said.

Singh is not the only qualified worker forced into manual labour to make ends meet. From Rajasthan and Jharkhand to Karnataka and Telangana, there are many like Singh toiling as labourers constructing roads, bridges, check dams and tilling land.

Lumping their pride, they have no qualms about doing manual work to feed their hungry families. As the MGNREGA guarantees everyone holding a job card 100 days of work, the rural job scheme has come as a godsend for the newly-unemployed. Workers are paid ₹202 a day, up from ₹182 before the Covid-19 lockdown.

Giving Singh company is Sita Verma, a 30-year-old arts graduate, whose postgraduate husband Shanker Lal was a school teacher. Lal lost his job and the desperate couple had no income. Sita finally turned to MGNREGA on May 16 to feed her little children.

"I am doing such manual labour for the first time in my life, that too in this heat. As my husband has not been paid since March, I had no choice but to get a job card made," she said.

A few kilometres away at Aasalpur village is Sakaram Jat, 36, a double MA. He used to teach school students up to Class X, but has been not been since March. He, too, has been reduced to becoming a manual labourer at an MGNREGA site. "I have no other source of income as the school where I worked has not paid me a penny for the last three months," he said.

Sadanand Mukkannavar in Karnataka's Gadag district was a maintenance engineer in Bengaluru, earning ₹50,000 a month. When the virus struck, his company showed him the door, asking him to return only after the disease abates.

Sadanand now works at a farm in the Kadadi gram panchayat limits under the MGNREGA. "I cannot sit idle so I started working on a daily-wage basis. It may take 4-5 months to rejoin duty so something is better than nothing," he said.

CONTINUED ON: P7

YOUR NEWSPAPER IS TOTALLY SAFE

Mandi stranglehold on farmers goes

State laws restricted to market perimeter alone; ad-hocism on stocking and export ends

MANISH ANAND @ New Delhi

LONG-AWAITED agrarian marketing reforms got a decisive push in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved three Ordinances to unshackle farmers from restrictive state laws on mandis (APMC Act) and price fluctuations (Essential Commodities Act), besides allowing unhindered contract farming.

The Centre took the Ordinance route after all persuasion to prod states on agricultural marketing reforms failed.

Freeing farmers from compulsions to sell their produce only to registered licensee traders of state governments under the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Act (APMC), the Cabinet gave the nod to "The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and facilitation) Ordinance, 2020". No state law will affect sale-purchase of agricultural produce outside the mandi perimeter. Buyers would just need to have PAN cards, rules for which will be framed by the Centre, said Union Minister for Agriculture Narendra Singh Tomar after the Cabinet meeting.

Doing away with policy adhocism through stock-holding limits and banning exports to curb price rise, the Cabinet approved the second Ordinance to amend the Essential Commodities Act to take cereals, onions, pulses, edible oils, oilseeds and potatoes out of its purview. The the law can be changed only in the event of war or excessive price rise, added Tomar.

To promote the concept of 'one nation, one agricultural market', the Cabinet, through the third Ordinance, allowed farmers and bulk buyers to enter into contracts at guaranteed prices, adding no state laws will affect such transactions. Farmers will also be able to get part of the additional value at the time of delivery of the produce. It does not mean leasing of land, said Tomar, adding that in the event of crop failure, only advance paid to them by the buyers could be recovered.

Payments to farmers must be made by buyers within three days of delivery of the produce, while dispute resolution will first be through mediation at the sub-divisional magistrate level and the final award by the district magistrate.

NITI Aayog's proposal in 2015 to reform state farm laws had drawn a tepid response.

ORDINANCE ROUTE TAKEN

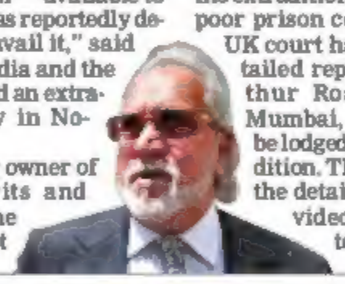
The Cabinet decided on ordinances because states refused to introduce reforms. There was vested interest in mandis as their managers have political clout since they are money spinners

Mallya to be extradited 'anytime soon', says ED

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

BELEAGUERED liquor baron Vijay Mallya is likely to be extradited to India "anytime soon", according to a senior Enforcement Directorate officer. Mallya has been living in London since he left India in March 2016.

"Mallya has exhausted all available legal options in the UK with the last appeal, which he lost in the UK top court on May 14 against his extradition to India. There was one more option — of mercy petition — available to him, but he has reportedly decided not to avail it," said the officer. India and the UK had signed an extradition treaty in November 1993.



The former owner of United Spirits and founder of the now defunct Kingfisher Airlines, Mallya faces charges of fraud and money laundering to the tune of Rs 9,000 crore. The charges against him are being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate.

Though sources in both agencies denied sending any team to London to bring Mallya back, they told *TNIE* that he may return to India on his own since there are no more legal remedies left for him in the UK.

Mallya had pleaded against his extradition to India citing poor prison conditions. The UK court had sought a detailed report on the Arthur Road prison in Mumbai, where he will be lodged after his extradition. The CBI had sent the details along with a video of the prison to the UK court.

K'TAKA COVID UPDATE | TOTAL CASES 4,063 | CURED/DISCHARGED 1,514 | DEATHS 53

Govt eases travel curbs on foreign businessmen

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Ministry of Home Affairs on Wednesday excluded businessmen and healthcare professionals from the travel restrictions imposed on foreigners in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, but they will have to obtain a fresh visa before flying in.

As per the order, relaxation of curbs will apply to foreign businessmen seeking to visit India on a business visa (other than on B3 visa for sports) in non-scheduled commercial chartered flights. Healthcare professionals, health researchers and technicians required to carry out technical work in India's healthcare facilities will also be allowed to come in. But, a fresh visa will be issued to them only if they have a letter of invitation from a recognised authority.

Specialists wanting to visit India to work for foreign companies — including manufacturing, IT and financial sector companies — operating in the country have also been excluded from travel curbs. All foreigners will have to obtain fresh business or employment visa. Those holding a valid multiple-entry business visa (other than B-3 visa) would have to get it re-validated at an Indian mission in their country.

EXPRESS READ

India questions Pak on defacing carvings

New Delhi: In strong words, India on Wednesday conveyed its concern to Pakistan over reports of vandalism, defacement and destruction of Buddhist heritage in the Gilgit-Baltistan region. P8

CM: Shift some govt offices to Belagavi

Bengaluru: Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Wednesday told authorities to identify government offices to be shifted from here to Belagavi's Suvarna Vidhana Soudha, to address regional imbalance.

INHUMAN ACT

Outrage after jumbo's tragic death in Kerala

CYNTHIA CHANDRAN @ TPuram

CRIMINAL cases. Online petitions. Monetary rewards for informers. The public outcry over the tragic circumstances leading to the death of a pregnant elephant in Malappuram has left the culprits with little room to manoeuvre.

After Kerala Additional Chief Secretary (Forests and Wildlife) Asha Thomas asked officials to take separate police and forest cases, Mannarkkad DFO K K Sunil Kumar has registered a case under the Wildlife Protection Act which prescribes a prison term of seven years for killing a Schedule I animal. People, including those representing animal welfare groups, took to social media and other platforms condemning the elephant's death and demanding stringent punishment for the culprits. The elephant had chewed on a pineapple stuffed with firecrackers and died in a river with a burnt mouth on May 27.

The pregnant elephant which died on May 27 | MOHAN KRISHNAN

Sunil Kumar said that the 15-year-old pregnant and healthy elephant had strayed into the areas near NSS Estate at Uppukulam in Mannarkkad on May 20 or 21. The injury is suspected to have happened on May 23 at the Ambalappara outpost. By May 25, the injured elephant entered the Velliyar river to ease its pain. The postmortem by Dr David Abraham, assistant forest veterinary officer, Thrissur, revealed that it died due to asphyxia. P5